

Evolving English

English, like any other modern language, never stands still, and one of the clearest **indications** of its evolution is the continuous creation of new words and expressions, while others fall gradually into **disuse**. This, of course, requires dictionaries to be regularly updated. Such is the good reputation of the *Oxford English Dictionary (OED)* – the longest official dictionary of the English language, with around 600,000 words and their history – that new words are widely **deemed** to have officially arrived, to have become accepted, when they enter its pages. Not everyone greets the new arrivals with enthusiasm: there are new words many people regard as ugly, **contrived**, or simply unnecessary. Some recent additions to the *OED* reflect the importance of the internet and modern forms of electronic communication. The last twelve months have seen the **inclusion** of the adjective ‘bloggable’ (used to describe a subject regarded as a suitable topic for a blog) and the nouns ‘onliner’ (internet user) and ‘cyberbullying’ (use of the internet to **intimidate** or generally be nasty to someone, a problem associated primarily with children and teenagers using social networking sites). The *OED* has also included some of the extremely informal abbreviations used in emails, text messages and on Twitter, such as ‘IMO’ (in my opinion), ‘LOL’ (laughing out loud – used when someone finds something very funny) and ‘OMG’ (Oh my God/gosh/goodness – used to express shock or excitement).

Other recent additions to the *OED* include ‘light-bulb moment’ (a moment of sudden realisation), ‘lappy’ (slang for laptop), and – something most women have probably witnessed – ‘man flu’ (a common cold, as experienced by a man who **exaggerates** its symptoms and behaves as if he has a more serious illness). Another ongoing change, **albeit** a slow one, is in pronunciation. In Britain, for example, a recent project found that for many words that can be pronounced in different ways, there is a growing preference for one particular pronunciation. With ‘schedule’, for example, younger British people favour the American pronunciation, ‘skedule’, rather than the traditional British ‘shedule’. In the case of ‘garage’ they have largely **opted for** ‘GARidge’ instead of ‘gaRARGE’. The less favoured pronunciations might eventually die out – as happened with the pronunciation of ‘hospital’ without the ‘h’, widely regarded as correct in Britain in the nineteenth century. Few people in Britain would object to the above developments, but that is not true for some other tendencies identified by the project. For example, many young people in Britain apparently refer to the letter ‘h’ not as ‘aitch’ but as ‘haitch’, which might become increasingly tolerated but for the time being is widely regarded as wrong. Strangely, many young people also add an extra syllable to ‘**mischievous**’, pronouncing it ‘mischeevy-us’, which is **unambiguously** wrong and almost guaranteed to irritate schoolteachers.